

Arizona Adult Education Standards Overview of the Project



The purpose of this section is: (1) To provide an **overview** of the Arizona Adult Education Standards Project, including its history and current activities;

(2) To discuss future **implementation plans**, including information on professional development opportunities to be offered over the next two years; and

(3) To provide an opportunity for conference participants to **examine** and **discuss** the **content standards** and **sample activities**, particularly in an area that is relevant and of interest to them.

Anticipated Outcomes

As a result of reading this section, adult educators will have gained:

- **Understanding** of the intent of the Standards Project;
- **Information** regarding implementation expectations and available technical support systems and resources; and
- **Clarity** regarding content standards in specific areas, including indicators, sub-indicators, sample activities, and performance standards.

Background Information to Set Context for the Standards Project

In August, 1998, Congress re-shaped adult education in the United States with the passage of the *Workforce Investment Act (Title II* pertains to Adult Education and Family Literacy). The requirements of this legislation went into effect on July 1, 1999.

Essentially, Congress stipulated that continued federal funding for adult education is dependent upon evidence of real educational gains or skills which assist adult learners to find and retain employment or qualify for post-secondary education and training. The focus has shifted from input or activity-drive data (i.e., enrollment and attendance hours) to output or outcome-based data (i.e., demonstration of learning gains).

A related requirement of this legislation was that all states must write a plan detailing how the new law would be implemented locally over a five-year period.

Arizona clearly was ahead in terms of these requirements. For example, the Adult Education Standards Project was begun in January 1998, to ensure consistency in program content and student outcomes among adult education programs throughout the state. The purpose of this vital project is to build a sustainable curriculum framework and accountability system for adult education in Arizona. The fundamental aim of the Standards Project is to ensure high levels of achievement for all adult learners.

The Adult Education Standards Project is a critical strategy in Arizona's Five-Year Plan for Adult Education. The plan is organized into five key goals; each of which specifies a number of objectives and strategies. For example:

Goal 1 of the Five-Year Plan is to prepare Arizona adult learners to function effectively in the workplace, family, and community.

Objective 1 states that by June 30, 2001, the Arizona Adult Education community will utilize a performance accountability system that measures educational gains as they relate to the workplace, family, and community.

Additional goals stipulated in the Five-Year Plan for Adult Education are listed below:

Goal 2: To maximize the opportunities for adult education programs to provide continually improving adult education services.

Goal 3: To increase the capacity of adult educators through coordinated, effective professional development.

Goal 4: To maximize the effective use of technology at all levels of adult education.

Goal 5: To maximize the effective flow of ideas and information among stakeholders in adult education.

Why the Standards Project is Important

In short, the Adult Education Standards Project is important to the future of adult education in Arizona for several reasons.

Reason #1: *Value to Adult Learners*

The Standards Project is valuable to adult learners across the state because it provides consistent content and performance standards for implementation in all programs funded by the Arizona Department of Education.

Reason #2: *Value to Programs and Instructional Practices*

The Standards Project improves articulation and assists adult educators to more accurately assess student performance and measure program effectiveness.

Reason #3: *Value to the State of Arizona*

The Standards Project is valuable to the state in that it provides a strong foundation for effective delivery of services to all adult learners. Many of these adult learners come to adult education from other agencies. In addition, the Project offers benchmarks for learning and program performance as well as establishes high expectations for quality and accountability. This focus on accountability is extremely critical because our current methods of reporting data are very inadequate.

Reason #4: *Value to the Profession of Adult Education*

The Standards Project raises the bar on instructional performance and accountability which in turn increases the credibility of adult education within the field of teaching and learning.

The following vision, mission, and set of core beliefs guide the Standards Project:

VISION

Adult Education Standards are the cornerstone for quality teaching, quality learning, and quality lives.

MISSION

The Arizona Adult Education Standards Project provides the framework for adult learners to maximize their potential in the community, family, and workplace. The Project provides consistency and continuity of educational services throughout the state as well as an easily understood model, which communicates the contributions of adult education.

BELIEFS

We believe *adult learners* are

- multi-faceted, unique individuals.
- capable of learning.
- motivated by diverse life experiences.
- exploring ways to improve their lives through relevant educational opportunities.

We believe *adult education* is a learner-centered, interactive process which

- values and supports the individual in defining and achieving personal goals; and
- develops and improves basic and life skills in the community, family, and workplace.

Overview of the Adult Education Standards Project

The Standards Project is organized into four **key phases**:

Phase I (1998)

During this phase, a team of more than 30 adult educators met from February to June, 1998 to write the initial drafts of the content standards in reading, writing, mathematics, ESOL, and citizenship test preparation. This team produced a number of drafts which were critiqued by external reviewers and informal focus groups.

Phase II (1999)

During this phase, a team of 13 adult educators worked to finalize the content standards using feedback data gathered from regional focus groups held in Flagstaff, Phoenix, Tucson and Yuma. Comments and suggestions from 115 adult educators and adult learners were consulted in making final revisions to the content standards.

In addition, another team of 27 adult educators began development of performance standards in reading, writing, mathematics, ESOL, and citizenship test preparation.

A third team of and fourth team of 23 adult educators worked together to develop recommendations to help adult educators learn more about the standards and provide assistance in using them. This team produced multi-year plans for professional development and communications and marketing.

Phase III (1999 - 2000)

The focus of the third year of the Standards Project is four-fold:

- (1) To finalize performance standards in reading, writing, mathematics, ESOL, and citizenship test preparation.
- (2) To create content and performance standards in science and social studies.
- (3) To determine appropriate assessment strategies.
- (4) To provide professional development opportunities, including regional workshops on curriculum alignment and a special training and coaching program for standards specialists.

Expectations for the Future

Two critical objectives shape expectations for the future.

- (1) By July 1, 2000, every program funded by the Department of Education will have aligned its curriculum in reading, writing, mathematics, ESOL, and citizenship test preparation to the content and performance standards.
- (2) By June 30, 2001, every program funded by the Department of Education will have aligned its curriculum in science and social studies to the content and performance standards and implemented appropriate assessment strategies to measure achievement of the standards.

It is important to emphasize that the content and performance standards are living, dynamic documents which are open to continuous improvement. As these standards are implemented and used, feedback from adult educators and learners in the field will be used to periodically revise and refine them.

Revisions also may be prompted by external sources. For example, a recent federal regulation requires addition of two performance levels in standards related to ABE and ASE (Adult Secondary Education -- formerly GED). These changes are not reflected in the standards document distributed at the general session on Thursday. These changes will be made when the performance standards work team resumes its work in December.

Processes used to develop Content and Performance Standards

The processes used to develop the content and performance standards have been highly participatory and interactive. The approach used to develop the standards combined both "process" and "substance." The "process" encompassed the active involvement of more than 175 adult educators across the state over a two-year period. There were numerous drafts of the standards, each one an improvement from the one

before it. The “substance” focused on the articulation and continuous improvement of rigorous and realistic standards for adult learning in specific subject areas.

The project’s steering committee comprised of nine adult educators and the State Director of Adult Education provided overall guidance and direction. Consultation and facilitation in writing the standards and developing recommendations to support implementation were provided by external consultants, Gail Digate of Leadership Learning Systems and Susan Pimentel of StandardsWork.

Standards-Related Definitions and Terms

Goal

A goal is the end result of a learning experience; it reflects a purpose for instruction but does not designate the specific abilities that the learner must possess.

For example: *To become a proficient runner.*

Content Standard

A content standard defines what a learner must know and be able to do. It is written in jargon-free English so instructors and adult learners can understand it.

For example: *The learner is able to run one mile.*

Indicators and Sub-Indicators

Indicators and sub-indicators contain all the skills and knowledge a learner needs to master the more broadly stated content standard. Indicators and sub-indicators detail the content standard by describing the skills, habits, and understanding that the learner must master.

For example: *Indicator 1 The learner understands the physiology of the body.*

Sub-indicator Describes the physiology of muscles, bones and the cardiovascular system.

For example: *Indicator 2 The learner runs safely.*

Sub-indicators • Warms up and cools down safely.

- Paces self and breathes correctly while running.
- Uses correct foot position when running (i.e., heel-toe-heel running)
- Observes the rules of the road (i.e., faces traffic, observes signs, runs on sidewalk or shoulder of the road)

Sample Activities

Sample activities are meant to demonstrate the indicators and sub-indicators. They are not required activities. Rather, they provide some useful ideas, suggestions and possible ways to bring the standards and indicators to “life.” Sample activities are provided in the standards document as a resource to instructors.

Core Competencies and Settings

Core competencies apply the content standard in an interactive process.

Sample activities were developed using three (3) core competencies and three (3) major settings. The core competencies are communication skills, interpersonal skills, and critical thinking skills. The settings are in the family, workplace, and community.

Returning to our sports analogy as an example:

A sample activity would involve the learner in entering a charity run in support of a cancer research project.

- Core competencies incorporated into this sample activity include:
- *Communication skills* needed to fill out entrance forms.
- *Interpersonal skills* needed to interact appropriately with the officials of the charity run.
- *Critical thinking skills* needed to plan a training program to prepare for the charity run.

Performance Standard

A performance standard defines “how good is good enough” to meet the content standard. Said another way, a performance standard indicates how competent or adept a learner demonstration must be to show attainment of the content standard.

Four (4) levels have been proposed for performance standards in adult education:

(1) *Beginning* (performance has a way to go); (2) *Approaching* (performance not quite “there”); (3) *Met* (acceptable performance); and (4) *Mastery* (excellent performance).

For example: *The learner is able to run one mile in seven minutes.*

Curriculum

Curriculum is best characterized as a description of what should take place in the classroom, delineating in greater detail the topics, themes, units, and questions contained in the content standards. Curriculum serves as a guide for instruction. Unlike content standards, curricula can vary somewhat from region to region or program to program, provided they focus on delivering the “big ideas” and concepts that the standards require learners to understand and apply.

For example:

Curriculum for our sports analogy might include units on physiology, questions and topics to cover, suggested reading material, and training sessions needed in order to ensure learners are able to run one mile safely and efficiently.

Assessments

Assessments define the nature of evidence required to demonstrate that the content standard has been met. For example, assessments may include essays, solutions to a mathematical problem, or answering

questions in reference to a reading passage.

An assessment for our sports analogy might require the learner to run one mile, demonstrating his/her ability to use proper form and observe the safety rules of running (e.g., *performance-based assessment*).

Another assessment might ask the learner to take a written test, demonstrating his/her understanding of the physiology of running (e.g., a *criterion-referenced test*, including multiple choice and short answer questions).